Released for Press use

NEWS

FROM YOUR MUSEUM

THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 33 TORONTO November, 1943

NEW MURAL DEPICTS GREEK FAMILY LIFE

A mural depicting Greek family life has been completed in the Royal Ontario Museum. Using its own exhibits to help reconstruct the scene, the Museum has portrayed the home of a well-to-do Greek in the late fifth century before Christ. We see the family gathered at noon in the inner court, with its gaily painted pillars and mosaic floor. The children are playing on the upper gallery. Below, an old slave is roasting meat on the altar, an offering to the gods and a treat for dinner, for the wife's brother has come to call. He and his host rest comfortably on couches in the shade eating dried fish and garlic, coarse bread and cheese. A slave pours the wine which will soon induce someone to take the lyre from the wall and sing heartily. Meanwhile the women are weaving near-by. Museum visitors will enjoy determining which objects in the picture have been copied from originals in the near-by cases.

THE MUSEUM GOES NORTH

An Elizabethan shoe and an Eskimo boot, a flint-lock pistol and a boomerang, an Eighteenth Century embroidered coat and a gauntlet of plate armour both worn by men, a mummied hand and a Babylonian clay tablet, and last but not least a live red-bellied snake—these were some of the objects taken north recently by Miss Ruth Home of the Royal Ontario Museum's staff. Miss Home has visited North Bay, Kirkland Lake, Timmins, etc., and the Museum has become more real to the hundreds of Elementary and Secondary School students and their teachers. The venture, the second of its kind, was organised by the Museum with the co-operation of the Department of Education and the local Inspectors.

FORGERY PROOF SIGNATURES

In Mesopotamia, 3000 years before Christ, official and legal red tape was highly developed. Then as now people had to sign on the dotted line. Although the ancient Near East claims the earliest known systems of writing, its masses remained illiterate. Documents were written on clay tablets by professional scribes but "John Henry's" signature was personally imprinted on the soft clay by means of a seal. The seal was usually in the form of a small stone cylinder, fore-runner of the rotary printing machine. It was owned and worn by the signatory who was protected against forgery by the variety and intricacy of its design. The Royal Ontario Museum has recently put on display a fine collection of these ancient seals.

ONCE UPON A TIME it took a worker months to make enough lace to provide a man with neck and sleeve ruffles. Fine 17th and 18th century laces in the Royal Ontario Museum show the skill and patience of these lace workers.

MUSEUM HOURS

Open Week Days except Monday 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.
Sundays 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.

MUSEUM GETS PREHISTORIC ANTLER

Recently the Royal Ontario Museum was presented with the tip of an antler of the prehistoric "deer-moose" known to science as Cervalces. The specimen was found in one of the sandy layers towards the base of the bluffs at Scarborough, on the shore of Lake Ontario. These sands were deposited in a body of fresh water which covered that region half a million years ago at a time when the great ice sheet temporarily retreated from southern Ontario.

Cervalces, now extinct, is thought to have resembled a moose, with its long head and broad, branched antlers. Other features suggest some relationship with the deer. This mammal probably browsed on the lush foliage of the forest, came at evening to drink at the margins of the lake or river, and occasionally met its contemporaries the mastodon and woolly mammoth. The antler specimen in the Museum could scarcely have been a trophy of the chase. In all probability there were no human hunters to pursue the "deer-moose" in the autumn woods of those far off days.

WINTER CLOTHES STRICTLY PRACTICAL

Now is the time when inhabitants of the northland are changing into winter clothes. This applies not only to Indian and trapper but to numerous wild creatures some of which undergo a marked transformation. Brown hares and weasels and mottled ptarmigan (Arctic grouse) will quickly acquire coats as white as the snow that will blanket their homeland. Specimens of these animals in the Royal Ontario Museum's study collections show various stages in this change. It is not accomplished by some mysterious transmutation of colour in the old coat as has been supposed by some people. It comes about by the replacement of hair or feathers, a doffing of old and growing of new. Winter clothes for wildlife, unlike those of humans, are not "designed" to be revealing. The style for this year, as every year, will be strictly practical.

TOPAZ FOR NOVEMBER

We usually think of topaz as being yellow in colour. According to authorities at the Royal Ontario Museum, it is not necessarily so. It is very often colourless or light blue. The yellow variety, however, is the one most commonly cut as gems.

Unfortunately the name topaz has become somewhat abused. "Spanish topaz", "Maderia topaz", and "false topaz" are all names given to quartz stones made to resemble topaz. Sometimes the adjective gets left off and the stone becomes simply "topaz".

As an ancient gem the topaz was believed to cure dimness of vision. During part of the fifteenth century a certain topaz with a religious background was supposed to be a positive cure for the plague.

Although not at present considered to be a precious stone, it is a very satisfactory gem—beautiful and durable. It is somewhat softer than ruby but harder than emerald. It is sometimes used to symbolize friendship.